

No but, Yes and Facilitation Guide

What is it?

Classroom or professional environments can often create fear, squelch innovation, and reduce motivation by the way we respond to others' ideas. In this activity—inspired by a standard improv comedy drill—participants learn how building on ideas rather than attacking them keeps divergent thinking flowing and fosters creativity.

Why use it?

Inclusivity and **perspective taking** are critical to generating the divergent thinking that drives imagination, creativity, and, ultimately, Principled Innovation. At the same time, however, presenting divergent ideas—those ideas that diverge from customary patterns of thought—can be intimidating, as we can be fearful of seeing our ideas be criticized by others. Even if everyone in the discussion engages the PI assets of **humility**, **empathy**, and **civility**, it still can be difficult on a practical level—whether in the classroom or during meetings with parents or colleagues—for us to turn divergent thinking into creative and constructive ideas. Thus, Principled Innovation requires environments in which we feel safe to express our divergent ideas.

In this activity, participants use “No but, Yes and”—an activity drawn from improv comedy—to rapidly experience the difference between destructive and constructive environments. Framing divergent thinking in “Yes, and” language (whether verbally or simply in our minds) can help us think constructively about these ideas and creatively build upon them. The 3-minute video provided below was produced in a middle school classroom and can be used to give preservice teachers an opportunity to think about how this might work in a future classroom.



What you need

- Time: 10-15 minutes
- Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rC9_wNpXmD4

Instructions

Step 1: Prepare

Read the “Why use it” section above and review the video.

Step 2: Situate

Situate the viewing by stating that the asset in focus in this activity is creativity, which PI framework defines in the following way:

Creativity is generating fresh and valuable ideas and possibilities by perceiving the world in new ways and making contextual connections between things that may seem unrelated.

Explain that fresh ideas necessarily “diverge” from our customary way of seeing things, and pursuing those ideas is an important part of driving creativity. Explain that seeking the perspectives of diverse constituents—whether they be students, parents, or colleagues—is an important part of generating those divergent ideas. Further explain that, on the flip side, it can be intimidating to be the one who presents those divergent ideas, so it is important to create an atmosphere in which ideas are welcome, which the “Yes and” phrasing can help produce.

Phase 3: Present

Present the video for the participants.

Step 4: Discuss

1. Following the approach of the video, ask participants to suggest three innovative educational proposals to be the experiment for the course, and then have a show of hands to select the winning proposal.
2. Have the participant state the idea in front of the group and be prepared to defend the idea as five people critique the proposal with “No, but...” statements. Then, ask participants how they think it would feel to have their own ideas shot down in this way.
3. Then, using the same statement, have five people build on the idea with “Yes, and...” statements. As with step three, ask participants to note the difference.
4. Ask participants to consider how framing divergent ideas in these terms would change the tone of their relationships with friends, family, colleagues, or their own students.